Volume 16 2023
Journal of the Department of English
Vidyasagar University Midnapore-721102 WB

The Gandhian Whirlwind and Its Role in the Making of the Nation: A Study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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Abstract

The Revolt of 1857—a watershed moment in Indian history—expedited the process of transformation in India's social and political sphere. The 1930s saw a social transformation as novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao attempted to grasp the social scene with distinct themes, issues, and representations of the real Indian world. This unprecedented awakening dawned a change among the people—to liberate themselves from the clutches of British rule. The force that made it possible was the Gandhian ideology that brought the people under the shade of one umbrella to fight the colonisers. The Independence movement in India provided an impetus to writers who were committed to writing about the changing socio-political scenario during the 1930s. The situation was such that the writers of the time could not avoid talking about the issues which mattered to them, and this helped them form a consensus about the political turmoil that India was going through. Gandhi has occupied a special place in the hearts of people worldwide. It would be interesting to study how Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have used the Gandhian ideology by providing a frame of reference to link them to the soil and take them to the roots of Indian culture, thereby creating in them the social awareness to look at man as a social animal, an individual with his responses and reactions, and also to foster the very idea of national identity in the inhabitants.

Keywords: Gandhian whirlwind, nation, Indian novels in English, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao

> Gandhi … was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths; like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds.
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> —Jawaharlal Nehru (Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 358)

The Revolt of 1857 is often considered to be the watershed moment in Indian history as it galvanised the process of transformation in the political and social topography of India. The end of World War I turned out to be a significant period in Indian history, as the

Gandhian whirlwind swept across the country, dislodging established political strategies and ushering in new ideas and methods that swayed Indian life to its core (Naik 120). The momentum of political agitation was carried out by national leaders such as Tilak and Annie Basant until the arrival of Gandhi in India in 1915 after his successful use of *Satyagraha* (passive resistance) in South Africa. Gandhi achieved success by employing his weapon of non-violence in Champaran against the exploitation of the tenants of Indigo planters in 1917. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre, which took place in 1919 as a result of the anti-Rowlatt agitation, is still remembered as one of the most heinous episodes in Indian history. This resulted in a deeper scar in the Indo-British relationship than the Mutiny of 1857 had inflicted on them. By the 1920s, Gandhi's leadership assumed an all-India tone/national figure, and his launch of the first Non-Cooperation Movement was almost symbolic of the end of an era and the beginning of another. The movement, though short-lived, generated an unparalleled awakening among Indians, with the most notable characteristic being the transformation of Indian nationalism "from a middle-class movement to a mass emotion" (Iyengar 248). All these activities helped Gandhi capture the popular imagination of the masses, leading to the formation of a national hero. The Gandhian epoch, which spanned over three decades, was marked by profound transformations not only in politics but also in practically every aspect of Indian life.

In the history of India, the period between World War I and World War II is often termed the "the Gandhian Age" (Iyengar 248). Gandhi appeared on the scene in 1915, transforming every sphere of Indian national life—politics, religion, education, and economics—with his charisma. He was neither a writer nor he was interested in the art of writing, but as a public figure, he had to talk and write a lot. People gathered in large numbers to register their resentment and disenchantment for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre until it took the shape of a blazing national agony. His chance encounter with John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860) seems to have had a profound impact on Gandhi, which he himself had acknowledged in his autobiography. Later writers such as Tolstoy and Thoreau helped him shape his idea of passive resistance (*Satyagraha*), which he, in fact, practised in 1906 at Johannesburg. The magnanimity of Gandhi lies in the fact that he achieved greatness after having gone through a rigorous process of trial and error, aspiration, and endurance. Gandhi is incomplete without discussing his seminal work *Hind Swaraj*, which is a result of his reading, thinking, and experimenting with the truth. It is structured in the form of a dialogue between "Reader" and "Editor" (essentially Gandhi himself), dealing with the key elements which he practised throughout his political career and encouraged both others and his followers to do the same strictly. They are: "India and England, Italy and India, Civilization, Swaraj, machinery, Hindu-Muslim unity, law and medicine, education, violence and *ahimsa*, and the doctrine and practice of *Satyagraha*" (Iyengar 252). Based on these ideals of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi's cry for national awakening promulgated/appropriated the ending of political subjugation and economic degradation, the removal of social inequalities, abuses like untouchability, caste, arrogance, occupational prejudices, and so on, while the reform of education added new life to the language and literature of the time.

Due to Gandhi's conviction in the wholeness of human life, all issues—social, political, economic, educational, and personal—are interconnected and must be viewed as a whole. Because of this, the fundamental principles of Gandhian thought are inclusive of all facets of human existence. As Rama Jha highlights, his principles, in a nutshell, "are:

ahimsa (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (chastity), *asangraha* (non-possession), *sharirashrama* (physical labour), *aswada* (control of the palate), *sarvatrabhayavarjana* (fearlessness), *sarvadharsmanatva* (equality of all religions), *swadeshi* (self-rule)" (164), and the age-old fight to remove untouchability and the caste system. He combined the ideas of nationalism and the work ethic he had absorbed from western ideas with all these old Hindu principles. Gandhi operated within the constraints of historically and culturally conditioned possibilities. He combined the greatest elements of the East and the West.

Gandhi was not a "systematic thinker" or "system-builder" like Locke or Descartes. He was a God-fearing man, but he was pragmatic too when it came to the issue of handling any real-time incident. After carefully reviewing all religions, Gandhi selected those principles that served humanity, especially the oppressed or the downtrodden. As D. K. Dutta aptly puts, "religion, for Gandhiji, is to be searched out in the service of mankind. He dedicated and devoted his whole life to the service of the masses, which, in fact, was the essence of his religion" (137). Truth and *Karma Yoga* (path of action) are the two ideas that Gandhi used throughout his career. His idea of humanism and love for religion superseded his idea of patriotism. The impact of Gandhian ideology on contemporary writers resonated at various levels and in various directions. One such shift/ move which was noticeable during the time was the renewed interest in village life over city life. Other than novels and drama, poems have also assimilated the ideals of Gandhism. Thus, Sarojini Naidu spoke in her sonnet, "The Lotus":

> O Mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,
> In myriad-petalled grace inviolate,
> Supreme over transient stores of tragic Fate,
> Deep-rooted in the waters of all Time, (Iyengar 289)

Naidu here addresses Gandhi as "O Mystic Lotus", and the parallelism that she draws between the Lotus and the Mahatma is pregnant with meanings and the whole poem reverberates with that tempo. The Gandhian era was unavoidably influenced by defining events in Indian society. The novel's rapid popularity during the 1930s, when the Gandhian movement was possibly at its pinnacle, is a highly significant characteristic. One can understand the connection when one considers that by this decade, the nationalist resurgence had shaken the entire society to its foundation to a degree and on a scale never seen before, making us aware of the pressure of the present in all aspects of national life. Had there been no Gandhi during these decades, we would not have authors like K. S. Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan. So it is evident the kind of influence Gandhi exerted on the literary landscape of the time.

Like the American novelists of the nineteenth century, Indian novelists of the twentieth century were concerned about the changing socio-political landscape of the nation and the destiny of the country. As Meenakshi Mukherjee puts it, "the independence movement in India was not merely a political struggle but an all-pervasive emotional experience for all Indians in the nineteen-twenties and thirties" (43). So, the writers who were writing in those years could not avoid talking about the changing socio-political scenario of the nation. Thus, a good number of novels written during the 1920s and 1930s primarily deal with the national experience either as a central theme or background or backdrop to a personal narrative.

In this article, I intend to analyse how Gandhi's ideals have been appropriated in the novels written during the first half of the twentieth century, which is a matter of great investigation. He becomes the brand Gandhi when things/acts or activities are being done or performed with or without his signal. There is hardly any discipline that Gandhian ideals have not impacted or touched.

Mulk Raj Anand: *Untouchable* (1935)

Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), the eldest of the trio, was one of the founder-members of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). He was writing at a time when the Gandhian spell had caught the popular imagination of Indians. It was quite obvious that the literature of the time would reflect the changing socio-political scenario of the 1920s at great length. His participation in the Gandhian movement during his college days landed him in jail for a brief period. Anand's stature in India with regard to the task of exposing social evils reminds us of Charles Dickens (1812–1870) in Victorian England (Iyengar 339). Anand took a revolutionary step in writing his first novel Untouchable, which is based on the issue of untouchability. Since then, many novels written on the same issue have appeared in Indian English literature as well as Indian regional literatures. Some important novels include T.S. Pillai's *Scavenger's Son* (1947), Padmini Sengupta's *Red Hibiscus* (1962), K.S. Karanth's *Chomana Dudi* (1975), U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Bharatapura* (1973), and Shanta Rameshwar Rao's *Children of God* (1992). However, none of these texts matches the qualities of Anand's *Untouchable* (1935). As a young student in London, he was very briefly associated with and was influenced by the Bloomsbury Group. So, in his writings, we can find these twin influences: the influence of the modernist writers of Britain and of Gandhi and his experience while he was living in Sabarmati Ashram. Anand "showed him a draft of a novel he had written; Gandhi reportedly gave him feedback and he rewrote the novel, taking the great man's advice to heart" (Gopal 50). *Untouchable* took its present shape when Gandhi advised Anand "to cut down a hundred or more pages" (qtd. in Jha 167). With regard to the themes of Anand's novels and the nature of the impact that Gandhi had on his novels, Rama Jha states:

> Gandhian humanism helped decide the choice of his themes as well as protagonists and also his fictional technique of stark realism. His whole concentration on Bakha and Munoo shows his unmistakable sympathies with the downtrodden and lowliest of Indian society. And it is on Gandhian lines that Anand has presented a critique of the modern, industrialized and mechanized society. (168)

In view of the above discussion, it becomes clear that the influence of Gandhian thought is integrated with the vision of life that Anand's novel talks about. Other than *Untouchable*, his novels like *Swami and Friends* (1935) and *The Sweet Vendor* (1967) also highlight Gandhian ideals. Narayan's art of characterisation is primarily conditioned by the ordinary man's opinion about Gandhi as an epitome of all that is good and beneficial for modern Indian society.

Unlike the other novel *Kanthapura*, taken up or considered for analysis under the theoretical framework of Gandhian ideals, in Anand's novel, we do get a glimpse of Gandhi. "If *Untouchable* is the microcosm, *Coolie* is the macrocosm that is Indian society" (Iyengar 340). In *Untouchable*, evil is presented in the form of caste, whereas in

Coolie, evil has several incarnations/connotations like greed, selfishness, and inhumanity. During the course of the novel, we see how Gandhian ideals have moulded the persona of many characters, including the protagonist Bakha, who devotes his entire life to materialising these ideals. He inculcates those values and practices them with steadfast devotion. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the protagonist Leo Bloom's day in *Ulysses* and Bakha's in *Untouchable*, who are both presented as acting in a single day. The novel is about the exploration of the impact of caste cruelty on the protagonist Bakha, "a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied" (Anand 1), a sweeper from the outcaste community.

The novel shows Bakha's suffering and the various processes of social determination and religious orthodoxies. Through the character of Bakha, Anand depicts the poignant condition of untouchables, their inevitable hardships, and physical and mental tortures. Bakha is forced into the traditional profession of a sweeper. His chief duty is to keep the three rows of public latrines clean. He hates his job and society. His day starts with his father's voice, who always shouts at him; "'Get up, ohe you Bakhya, you son of a pig,' ... sure as a bullet to its target, from the midst of a, broken, jarring, interrupted, snore. 'Get up and attend to the latrines or the spays will be angry'" (Anand 5). The people of his caste were not allowed to go to the temple and other public places. If they touch anything, even unintentionally, that thing gets polluted. They have to stop or change their direction if someone from the high class is coming or going the same way. The kind of abuse hurled at him on a daily basis is abominable when upper-caste people often address or call him as "Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! The offspring of a pig" (Anand 38). The series of incidents which troubled and reminded him of bitter experiences made Bakha consider himself an untouchable.

Bakha felt very hurt and became violent when he heard about the molestation of his sister. She was denigrated by the temple priest, who shamelessly tried to molest her while she was cleaning the lavatory of his house. The priest not only disgraced her but also accused Bakha of having polluted him. Every time an upper-caste Hindu passes, he has to make a formal accouchement, "*Posh* keep away, *posh*, sweeper coming, *posh*, *posh*, sweeper coming, *posh*, *posh*, sweeper coming" (Anand 42), so that they can save themselves from physical contact. Such is the level of humiliation he has to undergo on a daily basis. Bakha was once slapped by a high-caste Hindu because he touched him, and according to him, Bakha polluted him. He shouted at Bakha: "Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cockeyed son of bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and a take bath to purify myself" (Anand 38). Everyone whom Bakha meets in his day-to-day life—the sweet vendor, the soldier, the temple priest, the teacher, and the bullock-cart driver—looks down upon him because of the profession he has been handed down by his forefathers.

A chance encounter with the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar enlightens him about a proper drainage system, which could play an important role in eliminating untouchability from society. The poet believes that we should destroy the evil of the caste system from our society as it is one of the reasons for the prevailing inequality in our society. There should be equality of rights and opportunities for all, irrespective of their socio-political status. The defining moment comes towards the end of the novel when Bakha becomes part of a crowd which has gathered to see Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi appears in this novel

as a champion of human rights. Gandhi's presence in the narrative was for a very brief period of time. He arrives in Gulabo in this novel to address a meeting. He delivered a speech urging people to end untouchability in India. His mission and vision are to uplift the untouchables. He, in fact, uses a new terminology for untouchables, and they are now known as "Harijans" (men of God). He holds that those who practice untouchability are the greatest enemy of mankind, and on top of that, it is, according to him, a blot on Hinduism. He even expresses his wish to be reborn as an underdog who, day in and day out, faces discrimination. This is what Gandhi has to say in his political rallies:

> As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse of our iniquity. For me the question of these people is moral and religious…. (Anand 136)

Bakha also went to that place to listen to Gandhi's speech. He finds the Hindu, Lallas, Kashmiri Muslims, and many more people from the outcaste colony together in the crowd. This reflects Anand's consciousness of Gandhi's principles of equality and love for the helpless. Bakha realises that it is only Mahatma Gandhi who could bring unity among all classes and castes. He gets peace of mind when he hears Gandhi talking about the welfare of the untouchables. His speech fills his heart with hope for a better future where the downtrodden can lead a life without any fear of intimidation. Gandhi says, "I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism" (Anand 137). Bakha feels that at least someone is there for him and his class. He finds relief in Gandhi's words. Now he can follow the path he has chosen for his emancipation by donning a particular dress. Gandhism attempts to bring the Hindus, the Musalmans, and people of other sectors under one umbrella which is the need of the hour, and gives a new sense of identity to Bakha that he is not an untouchable but a human being.

Gandhi's announcement that he regards "untouchability as a sin" gives a new sense of hope to the whole text and hopes that India will build up as a nation of humanity and fraternity. Gandhi realised that this was the need of the hour; to get people together if India really wanted its freedom from the Britishers. Gandhi, during the course of his public meetings, emphasised that all public wells, temples, schools, roads, and sanatoriums must be made accessible to the people belonging to the lower strata of society. We have seen in the novel how the untouchables have been treated and how they have been denied access to basic amenities. Gandhi's presence has given him an opportunity to rediscover himself as a human being in his own society. This novel highlights the immense influence of Gandhi on Mulk Raj Anand and how his thoughts prompted him to pen down his views on inequality. The one solution that appears to be game-changing is the use of modern technology, that is, the use of the flush. According to Anand, this would usher in a new way to fight the problem of untouchability. Anand also talks about the right to education expressed through the character of Bakha, who is keen to pay an anna per lesson to a local boy as he wishes to read and write. Bakha emerges as someone who wishes to embrace any change if it is beneficial for the larger good of his community. The novel ends with the hope for a better life for the untouchables. After having heard the speech of Gandhi, Bakha goes back to his house with new hope in his heart that better days are coming for the untouchables.

This text has been seen as a national allegory of the modern untouchable who moves towards technology and freedom. It is not as if anything separates you from me after this

moment of Independence comes. The ideal imagined Indian nation, which we are less than two decades away from accessing when the novel was written in the 1930s, is read in this moment of Independence in 1947. So, we are almost there to access this ideal nation, but the untouchable character of *Untouchable* is still prohibited socially from realising India. And that is seen not in a symbolic sense alone; we also find it in the way the untouchable character comes in contact with the touchable citizens who are around him.

Raja Rao: *Kanthapura* (1939)

Raja Rao (1908–2006) is contemporaneous with Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan as he "makes with them a remarkable triad, affiliated with them in time and sometimes in choice of themes" (Iyengar 386), although their prose styles were different from one another. Like his contemporaries, he too is the product of the "Gandhian Age", and his works truly capture his "sensitive awareness of the forces let loose by the Gandhian Revolution" (Iyengar 385) as well as the orthodoxy and conservatism of contemporary society. Critics like Saroj Sharma argue that "the impact of Gandhian philosophy is the essence of the novel" (103); on a similar note, Ambuj Sharma opines that "*Kanthapura* is a true account of Gandhiji's ideals and principles and their impact on an Indian village" (104). Harish Trivedi writes that "*Kanthapura*…remains the most comprehensively and intimately Gandhian of all the Indian novels written in English" (108). Unlike Anand and Narayan, he is not a prolific novelist. He began his literary career with *Kanthapura* (1938), which is perhaps one of the finest Indian novels in English ever written and resonates with Gandhian discourse at length.

The story is about the dissemination of Gandhian values in Kanthapura, whose inhabitants initially seem to oppose them but then gradually embrace them. The novel is seen to capture the change and transformation that Indians were going through under the Gandhian spell spreading across India during the 1920s. The story of Kanthapura is perhaps the representative story of 10,000 similar villages across India: "Unifying villagers across gender, caste, and personal grievances and grudges, the novel conveys the possibility of nationalism unifying the country in a similar way" (Anjaria 157). It is a novel where Gandhi is used as the central theme of the novel. *Kanthapura* is a novel primarily dealing with Gandhian discourse—here, Gandhi is not only a man in flesh and blood; he becomes a brand is the conscience keeper of the inhabitants of this village. At times, he becomes a symbol; at times, he becomes an idea; and at times, a driving force too. The villagers are, in fact, caught in the Gandhian whirlwind or swept away by the current of his thought as a phenomenon they have never come across.

The narrator that Raja Rao uses in *Kanthapura* is Achakka, an elderly Brahmin lady of the village Kanthapura, but the style of narration makes this novel a *Gandhi Purana* (a story about Gandhi) more than a *Sthala Purana* (a story about a place), which is a piece of mere fiction. The reason for this is that Raja Rao uses the perspective of the elderly village lady Achakka to subtly undercut the Gandhism that Moorthy represents. We see this in play quite early in the novel when Achakka introduces to the readers her native village and its inhabitants. Rao's central character Moorthy, like other characters in the novel, not only acts as Gandhi's messenger but, at times, his visible avatar. In other words, Moorthy is the incarnation of Gandhi. He never appears in person in the novel as a character, unlike in Anand's *Untouchable* (1935).

Moorthy, the son of Narsamma, is introduced in the novel as a "noble cow, quite, generous, serene, deferent and Brahminic, a very prince …" (Rao 11), and he goes to the city to receive a western-style university education. He comes back to the village without even completing his education. The novel is primarily about this return and the Gandhian influence that inspires Moorthy to make this return. As we learn during the course of the novel, Moorthy, while in the city, has a grand vision in which he sees Gandhi urging him to give up his foreign clothes and his foreign university education and go back, in the words of the novel, to "the dumb millions of the villages" (Rao 40). Now, this is, of course, an exact echo of the sentiments of Gandhi as expressed in *Hind Swaraj* (1909).

Throughout *Kanthapura*, characters are not elaborated in terms of the working of their inner mind; rather, they are defined by external forces and the charismatic influence of the personality of Gandhi. Moorthy's transformation, for instance, into a Gandhi-man in the novel is a result of the domination of Gandhian discourse in the narrative structure of the novel.

> And suddenly there was a clapping of hands and shoutings of "*VandèMataram, Gandhi Mahatma ki jai*!" ... And as there was fever and confusion about the Mahatma, [Moorthy] jumped on to the platform, slipped between this person and that and fell at the feet of the Mahatma, saying, "I am your slave". The Mahatma lifted him up and, before them all, he said, "What can I do for you, my son?" and Moorthy said, like Hanuman to Rama, "Any command," and the Mahatma said, "I give no commands save to seek Truth," and Moorthy said, "I am ignorant, how can I seek Truth?" and the people around him were trying to hush him and to take him away, but the Mahatma said, "You wear foreign cloth, my son".—"It will go, Mahatmaji."—"You perhaps go to foreign Universities."—"It will go, Mahatmaji."—"You can help your country by going and working among the dumb millions of the villages."—"So be it, Mahatmaji." (Rao 40)

This passage presents Moorthy less as a traditional character than as his role as a medium to transmit Gandhian ideology in the village.

Moorthy is a devoted foot soldier of Gandhi in the village, and his devotion is unmatched, like Hanuman, whose devotion towards Ram is unquestionable. During the course of the narrative, we also see how this logic of charismatic influence helps consolidate the Gandhian base in the village. After the transformation of Moorthy, others too follow in his footsteps:

> Our Moorthy performed the camphor ceremony and from that day onwards Moorthy looked sorrowful and calm. He went to Dorè and Sastri's son Puttu, and Dorè and Sastri's son Puttu went to Postmaster Suryanarayana's sons Chandru and Ramu, and then came Pandit Venkateshia and Front-House Sami's sons Srinivas and Kittu, and so Kittu and Srinivas and Puttu and Ramu and Chandru and Seenu, threw away their foreign clothes and became Gandhi's men. (Rao 18–19)

Here, more than the influence or impact of Gandhi, it was his visit to their houses that brought some good results in the form of bringing them into the Gandhian fold. Although there was ambiguity in the passage with regard to the means by which this conversion took place, Kittu and Srinivas and Puttu and Ramu and Chandru and Seenu did become one.

Bhatta, the village priest, is another character who is shrewd and cunning and lends money at exorbitant rates; in the process, he exploits his own people. He seems to be very class-conscious and prejudiced and does not want to approve of Moorthy's amicable behaviours towards Pariahs and Sudras. If this practice becomes the normal activity in the village, then the days are not far away that the Pariahs would one day take over the Brahmins. This class consciousness is deeply rooted in the psyche of Bhatta and like-minded people in the village, and their hatred towards their own people is abominable. Bhatta is quite regressive when it comes to the matter of educating the women of the village, as he is of the view that by sending them to the city for studies, they might end up marrying people from other communities. As a result, "there will be confusion of castes and pollution of progeny" (Rao 34). Bhatta and Swami declare that they have no issue with the "khadi and all that" (Rao 35), but they are not going to entertain this Pariah business in Kanthapura as it would pollute the "progeny".

Young Moorthy, the Gandhi-man, knows that the gateway to the Indian mind is religion and presents the Gandhian ideals with the help of the age-old traditional *Harikatha* (legendary stories about gods and goddesses), and thus persuades the villagers. He takes the initiative to organise *Sankara-jayanthi* (celebrating the birth anniversary of Shankaracharya) in the village for two reasons: first, this platform would enable him to bring the villagers under one roof, as we know how religious faith unifies us. Second, these religious programmes or activities are meant to propagate the Gandhian ideals among the villagers as they would help pass/disseminate the information at a faster rate than any other means. In continuation of the process, they invited the renowned *Harikatha* man from the city to organise a grand *Harikatha* in the village along with other religious festivals like the Ram festival, the Krishan festival, and the Ganesh festival too, with one mission, which is to get everybody involved in spreading the teachings of Gandhi. They required funds to organise these festivals, so it was Moorthy who went from house to house taking everybody in confidence to inspire them to contribute as much as they could.

Moorthy breaks all the barriers; rather, he transgresses the boundaries which once held them back from mingling with people belonging to the lower strata of society. Adopting Gandhian ideals of untouchability, his biggest challenge is to bring them into the mainstream of society. Moorthy plays the role of a harbinger who leaves behind all inhibitions. Unlike the natives of the village, he had shown the courage to break the age-old tradition of looking down upon those who "neither pray like us and they live like us" (Rao 15). So, Moorthy's gesture seems to carry a positive message in the village with regard to bringing unity among them in order to overthrow the British. Moorthy's effort is on display;

> So Moorthy goes from house to house, and from younger brother to elder brother, and from elder to the grandfather himself, and—what do you think?—he even goes to the Potters' quarter and the Weavers' quarter and the Sudra quarter … We said to ourselves, he is one of those Gandhi-men, who say there is neither caste nor clan nor family, … Only they say, too, one should not marry early, one should allow widows to take husbands and a brahmin might marry a pariah and pariah a brahmin. (Rao15)

So, Moorthy's return to the village is therefore marked less by the desire to accept the traditional ethos of village life and more by the desire to transform the village population into a homogeneous mass which can then be directed against the colonial authority.

Jayaramachar, the *Harikatha* man from the city, beautifully juxtaposes the traditional mythology associated with Lord Siva and Parvati and contemporary political situations, thereby incorporating the core principles of *Hind Swaraj* (1909): "Siva is the three eyed, and Swaraj too is three-eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim Unity and Khaddar" (Rao 16). Gandhi here seems to be the incarnation of Siva as the former has undertaken the task of wiping out the serpent of British rule. These ideals were identified by Gandhi as the weapons to be used/employed not just in this village but in other parts of India, where people were striving hard to throw the Britishers out of this country. In fact, "*Khaddar*" (homespun cloth) becomes a symbol associated with Gandhi, who was successful in disseminating the idea to take up clothes made by Indians in place of foreign clothes.

Moorthy goes to the city for higher studies, and this is where he gets acquainted with Gandhian ideals. Leaving behind everything, he comes back to his village and dedicates himself fully to the well-being of the villagers. He, along with fellow Gandhi-men of the village, encourage the villagers to take up spinning as part of their programme with an aim to make them self-reliant. He especially encourages the women folk:

> To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to workless and work to the lazy. And if you don't need the cloth sister, "give it away to the poor" … Our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our mother. (Rao 23)

Spinning was one way of lending support to the Indians as it basically wanted to cut down the dependence on clothes made by the British. Moorthy becomes a guiding force in his vicinity, creating awareness of the importance of Gandhian discourse in the village and in India.

The arrival of Bade Khan is to be seen as the direct interference of state power in the village. He is sent there to watch over the activities of the people of Kanthapura, as there was massive preparation going on in the form of various religious activities by adopting Gandhian ideals. He is the symbol of state power as he has been planted by the British "because of Moorthy and his Gandhi affair" (Rao 22). The message from the city is loud and clear that they do not want this Gandhian whirlwind to spread further in the village or go beyond the boundary of this village. Any anti-Government activity will be silenced with the help of brute force—that is what their plan is.

The Congressmen, along with Moorthy, distribute "free spinning-wheel in the name of the Mahatma" (Rao 23) among the villagers so that they can take up spinning voluntarily without giving it a second thought. So, to spin one's cloth is considered to be sacred by the Mahatma since the Mahatma himself "spins for two hours immediately after his prayers" and he sees this act "as a purifying as praying" (Rao 25). So, these attributes elevated Gandhi to an idealised figure, and the villagers draw inspiration/motivation by following his footsteps.

The threat looming large over Moorthy is that he might be excommunicated as he was involved in activities which were against the established norms of the village. His mother

is in utter dismay, thinking that soon they will have to face ex-communication from the Swami and others. But Moorthy is steadfast and firm in his decision to continue what he has been doing in the village. There is no force which can stop his indomitable zeal or curtail his activity in the vicinity. After his mother's death, Moorthy takes up the responsibility to teach the people of the lower caste so as to educate them and make them aware of their political rights. This is how Moorthy was able to bring some positive changes among the villagers. Education is one such tool, which, if used effectively, can bring about a lot of changes or transformations in society, and they are direct beneficiaries of the system.

When Moorthy started his programme, he used to get overwhelming responses from the people of the village. Even at the time of organising *bhajans* (devotional songs), the response was huge. Soon after his mixing with the Pariah people, the people from his own community started distancing themselves from Moorthy. There was growing discontent in the village against Moorthy for his activities, which was seen by many as something blasphemous. As part of his outreach programme, Moorthy visits Rachamma's house, where he was welcomed by being offered milk in a brass tumbler. The reason for his visit was to spread the message of the Congress, as "Congress belongs to Mahatma" (Rao 78). They were offered the membership in Congress on the condition that if they really wanted to become Gandhi-men in the true sense of the term, then they would have to "spin and practice *ahimsa* and speak the truth" (Rao 78). Finally, Moorthy appeared to build up or stitch together a kind of pact with the people of the village by forming a committee under the banner of Congress. When the police land in Kanthapura to arrest Moorthy, we see how the villagers come in support of Moorthy amidst continuous sloganeering "*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!*" (Rao 125).The whole episode establishes the fact that they are all together whenever there is a crisis. They are by now conscious of their rights. So, Moorthy's absence leaves a kind of vacuum in the village. When he was produced before the magistrate, over-enthusiastic *vakils* (lawyers) and advocates expressed their desire to fight the case, but he refused to take any help as he wanted to fight his own case. Besides Moorthy, there are characters like Rangamma, Range Gowda, and Ratna the widow, who are at the forefront of the Gandhian Revolution in Kanthapura.

The novel ends on a surprising note where Moorthy, in a letter to Ratna, announces that he is no longer a Gandhian:

> Since I am out of prison, I met this Satyagrahi and that, and we discussed many a problem, and they all say the Mahatma is a noble person, a saint, but the English will know how to cheat him, and he will let himself be cheated ... I have come to realize ... when I was in prison, that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee Estate ... there will always be pariahs and poverty. Ratna, things must change. The youths here say they will change it. Jawaharlal will change it. You know Jawaharlal is like a Bharatha to the Mahatma, and he, too, is for non-violence and he, too, is a Satyagrahi, but he says in Swaraj there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an "equal-distributionist", and I am with him and his men. (Rao 182–83)

This passage clearly establishes Moorthy as an individual who is no longer a part of disseminating Gandhian ideology in the village. We actually see the central character Moorthy transforming into a Nehruvian character and shifting his allegiance from

Gandhi to Nehru. For a novel like this, which is primarily based on one single idea of the Gandhian allegory, the ending is surprising. However, this episode does not weaken Gandhian fervour in the villagers: "we are all [still] for the Mahatma" (Rao 183).

Truly, it takes the shape of a mass movement, with the active participation of the villagers, comprising men and women, blurring the thin line of caste hierarchy, as irrespective of their social status, they are now ready to fight the onslaught of external forces. This novel is a brilliant attempt to see how far the nationalistic fervour has penetrated even in remote villages, fusing the new upsurge with traditional religious faith, thus rediscovering the Indian soul.

It is not abstruse to discern how Gandhian philosophy has influenced the themes chosen, the creation of the characters, the development of the plot, and even the language used in the books of the 1930s. What is less obvious, as we have shown, is the close connection between Gandhian philosophy and these authors' conceptions of good and evil as expressed in their works. Regardless of how they portrayed the Indian social landscape, by internalizing Gandhi's ideas, their worldview was broadened in accordance with their particular preferences. For instance, for Raja Rao, Gandhi serves as a foundation for the novelist's search for theological and philosophical meaning, while in Anand, it combines with his extreme progressivism. Gandhian philosophy has continued to influence many of the succeeding Indian novelists in a very significant way. To borrow the words of Iyengar, "it must be admitted all the same that the impact of Gandhi at the deeper levels, provoking a transvaluation of current values, have not been effective enough to produce lasting results. Gandhi is often being cited more as a matter of form and convenience than of deep conviction" (292). The debate that surrounds Gandhi, and whether he is to be treated as an embodiment of an idea or a human being, a symbol or a tangible reality is ultimately to be evaluated/decided by readers after reading the texts where Gandhian ideals have been appropriated in the Pre-Independence era.

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